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Testimony of the Effects of the Proposed Budget Cuts for FY 2012
Before the Human Services Commission
September 21, 2011

I am providing written testimony due to my opposition regarding the proposed budget cuts to the Division of Mental Health and the Community Reintegration Program funded by the Division of Rehabilitation Services due to the impact that it will have on consumers who are already underserved.

From August of 2000-October of 2005 I was the Community Reintegration Coordinator at Advocates for Access formerly known as the Central Illinois Center for Independent Living. We were able to assist 54 individuals in that time period to leave a nursing home and return to the community. Some of these individuals were persons with mental illness who lived in regular nursing homes. We would make sure that they were linked up to the appropriate Mental Health Center prior to their transition into the community.

In 2008 I became the Program Manager at Advocates for Access. I have been increasingly concerned about how people with serious mental illness appear to be discriminated against regarding having a choice of where to live if the proper supports can be put in place. In August of 2010 we were informed that we could no longer assist individuals with serious mental illness through the Community Reintegration Program. We were further informed that if we have someone who has any serious mental illness diagnosis on their chart that we are to refer them to the Division of Mental Health so that they can take them through their Community Reintegration Programs. I followed up on the existence of these programs in our area and found out that they did not exist.

A few weeks ago I read an article in the paper that stated that three mental health Institutions were slated for closure by the Governor to balance the budget. Community Mental Health Services have also been cut. These cuts are despite lawsuits that were resolved to ensure that people with mental illnesses "who are capable of living more independently and in a situation that is more integrated into the community have the opportunity to do so with all the appropriate and necessary support". (Bloomington Pantagraph, March 15, 2010) Where are our individuals who have serious mental illness going to live? Where are they going to receive treatment with these proposed cuts?

Therefore, I ask you to oppose any cuts to the Division of Mental Health as well as cuts to the Community Reintegration Programs. I further ask that solutions be looked at regarding the assurance that people with mental illnesses who are capable of living more independently be given the opportunity to do so through a collaboration between the Division of Mental Health and the Division of Rehabilitation Services.

Respectfully,

Jodi Alwan

"Empowering People With Disabilities To Live Independently In Our Community"